"We'd Rather Be Destroying Pornography," the large wood-and-glass framed artwork Nikki Craft carried to the ACLU Bill of Rights Day event on December 15, 1991.

We'd Rather Be Destroying Pornography

Feminist Political Art and the Always Causing Legal Unrest Collage

ACLU-01 - Standalone Artwork and Companion Article

This work is not a decorative illustration of the archive. It is a visual argument about pornography, protected speech, institutional language, and feminist resistance. It is a work of art.

A Work Made From the Conflict It Names

The surviving photograph shows a dense handmade collage built from pornographic magazine imagery, political buttons, cut paper, painted lettering, and the counter-acronym ACLU: Always Causing Legal Unrest. Across the top, in red block letters on yellow, the work declares: "WE'D RATHER BE DESTROYING PORNOGRAPHY." The statement is both literal and strategic. It refuses the demand that feminists approach pornography as a neutral category of expression while women's bodies remain the raw material of the industry.

The collage does not isolate or beautify the sexual images. It crowds them together, overlaps them, interrupts them with objects and words, and denies them the uninterrupted visual access that commercial pornography ordinarily assumes. The result is not a collection of erotic fragments. It is a field of evidence under pressure.

ART, ENTERTAINMENT, FREE SPEECH, POLITICAL PROTEST

Four yellow labels cut across the images: ART, ENTERTAINMENT, FREE SPEECH, and POLITICAL PROTEST. These are not neutral captions. They are the institutional categories through which pornography has been normalized and defended. The work asks what happens when those labels are placed directly on the material they protect. Instead of settling the argument, the words become part of the indictment.

The labels also expose an unequal distribution of legitimacy. Commercial sexual imagery can be elevated through the language of art, entertainment, and speech. Feminist anger directed at that imagery is more easily described as censorship, extremism, or threat. The collage turns the vocabulary of legitimacy into visible material and forces it to compete with what the viewer can see.

Buttons Inside the Artwork

The buttons are not attached as decoration. They function as a second text. “Pornography Violates My Civil Rights” places women’s equality against the industry’s claim to protection. “Learn to Burn” and “I’d Rather Be Destroying Pornography” transform a slogan into an object that can be worn, sold, mailed, and finally embedded in a larger work. “Mitchell Brothers: 1 Down 1 To Go” and other confrontational designs locate the collage within the militant feminist debates of its time.

The button is a small public object. The collage is a larger private or exhibition object. Bringing them together collapses the distance between art and organizing. The same slogan can move from a woman’s coat, to a catalog, to a mailing, to a wall, and then into an archive decades later. The work records not just an idea but a circulation system.

The ACLU as Counter-Brand

At the bottom center, the initials ACLU appear in large purple letters over black, followed by the hand-lettered expansion “Always Causing Legal Unrest.” The familiar institutional acronym is made strange and then reclaimed. The counter-brand does not imitate official sobriety. It is handmade, unruly, and situated among the images and slogans the official civil-liberties framework had failed to address on feminist terms.

The work’s politics depend on that collision. The American Civil Liberties Union had made “free speech” a defining public identity. Always Causing Legal Unrest asked what that identity meant when pornography was treated as protected expression while feminist criticism of pornography was marginalized or threatened. The collage makes the argument without waiting for legal doctrine to authorize it.

Color, Surface, and Refusal

The bright yellow ground prevents the work from receding into respectable seriousness. Red, purple, turquoise, and black recall posters, handbills, button cards, storefront displays, and activist tables. The composition is deliberately overloaded. Its visual excess refuses the clean hierarchy through which institutions separate art from propaganda, speech from action, or political thought from women’s anger.

The pornographic images are themselves fragments of commercial design. By cutting and rearranging them, the work breaks their intended sequence. The commercial promise of passive consumption becomes a feminist demand to read, name, and judge. What the industry offered as entertainment is returned as political evidence.

Relation to the 1991 Bill of Rights Day Records

The police report preserved in ACLU-04 states that Craft was carrying a wood-framed protest artwork when she attempted to enter the ACLU Bill of Rights Day event on December 15, 1991. Nikki Craft identifies the work reproduced here as that exact object: a large collage mounted in a wooden frame behind glass. It was physically substantial - Craft could carry it, but could do little else while holding it.

Matthew Coles seized this framed work during the confrontation and broke its wooden frame. No photographs were taken inside the event; after the attack, Craft and the other women were occupied with the confrontation and then moved through a dark room speaking directly with ACLU members. The surviving photograph therefore carries unusual evidentiary importance: it preserves the work itself before or apart from the damage documented in the police record.

Why the Artwork Deserves Its Own Record

Placed only inside a general overview, the collage could be mistaken for an illustrative image. As a standalone archival object, its complexity becomes visible. It documents the relation between anti-pornography feminism, free-speech rhetoric, political graphics, button culture, and the material practice of collage. It also preserves the aesthetic of a movement that did not separate analysis from agitation.

The work belongs in the archive because it thinks. It shows how categories become shields, how commercial images acquire legal prestige, how activist objects carry arguments, and how feminist resistance can seize the visual materials of a hostile culture and reorganize them against their intended use.

Content Note

The artwork incorporates explicit sexual images taken from pornographic publications and confrontational anti-pornography slogans. The images are reproduced here as part of a feminist political artwork and historical record. They are not presented for erotic use or as endorsement of the industry being criticized.

Source and Provenance Note

Original source: one surviving color photograph supplied by Nikki Craft in 2026. Craft identifies the photographed collage as the large wood-and-glass framed artwork she carried to the ACLU Bill of Rights Day event on December 15, 1991 and that Matthew Coles broke during the confrontation documented in SFPD Incident Report No. 911701682. The artwork's exact creation date remains undetermined.

Publication and Collaboration Note

Prepared for the Nikki Craft Archival Project. Written by Nikki Craft with research, analysis, structural development, and editorial collaboration by Quillgenie (ChatGPT). The historical record, political interpretation, and final authorship are Nikki Craft's.